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# The Impact of Location Alteration on School Attendance of Chicano Gang Members

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The high school completion rate for Chicanos is only half that of non-Hispanics (Alvirez, 1981). For Chicano gang members, the completion rate is lower than that of the Chicano population as a whole. One study of six gang cliques in East Los Angeles found that high school completion rates were less than 11% for five of the six cliques (Moore, Garcia, Garcia, Cerda, & Valencia, 1978).

Of the various reasons cited for dropping out of school, at least one may be specific to the Chicano gang member: problems emanating from on-campus interaction with members of rival gangs (Torres, 1979). If the school is located within a territory claimed by one barrio, the campus may become a battleground for members of other barrios who wish to attend. Under such circumstances, gang members may find it easier to drop out than to continue attending.

It is uncertain whether gang members who drop out of schools located in other barrios would continue attending if a school were located at a neutral site or in their own barrios. If so, it would be reasonable to request school officials to provide alternative sites to meet the educational needs of this group. If not, then such a request would clearly be extravagant.

In the present study, the impact of such a school

site change is examined. The setting for this study was a community-based delinquency and gang violence prevention project. Preliminary studies indicated that gang members who dropped out of school frequently mentioned inter-barrio fighting as the most important reason for failing to continue school.

## Method

Negotiations. The first step in the study involved negotiations with school officials to provide school services at selected sites outside of the established school campuses. School officials were receptive to the idea because (a) they agreed that inter-barrio fighting had caused many gang members to quit school; and (b) there was already an active Alternative Studies Program (ASP) located on certain school campuses. The ASP was designed for students with special learning problems or for working students. The ASP provided a flexible approach to education in which students contracted with tutors to meet educational goals within specified time periods. Parental approval was required for participation. The request was to move the ASP to a neutral site in order to encourage gang members to attend. School officials agreed to this request and to provide regular credits to students attending at the alternative location.

Subjects. Thirteen males between the ages of 13 and 18 admitted to the gang violence prevention

project during a one-year period served as subjects for this study. This constituted the total number of male project participants not in school at the time of admission for the study period. Ten others were in school at the time of admission.

Three subjects (23%) reported inter-barrio fighting as the primary cause of their dropping out of school. Other reasons given included trouble with teachers, administrative site changes to undesirable locations, boredom, and marriage or birth of a child.

Experimental manipulations. Upon entering the gang prevention project, each subject was informed that a fully-accredited educational service was offered to him at a site near his home barrio. The subject was then encouraged to attend school during available hours in order to earn credits toward high school graduation. Subjects were not punished in any way for refusing to attend, and continued in the gang prevention project as a counselee or for employment referrals. Those who did elect to attend school at the alternative site were enrolled and study-contracts were drawn up for them. One unit of credit toward the high school diploma was granted by the school district for each 30-hour block of time attended. Additional units were granted for the completion of specific assignments, such as book reports or tests.

## Results

Of the thirteen subjects, five (38%) elected to return to school when offered the alternative site within their home barrio. Of the remaining eight subjects (62%) who did not elect to take advantage of the alternative site to further their education, half (four) were employed in work they found satisfying.

## Discussion

The baseline rate of return-to-school for Chicano gang members is not known, but in view of the high rates of non-completion, it can safely be assumed that the rate is small, probably not greater than 10%. Thus, the alteration of school site increased the rate of return-to-school by 28% at least, from a hypothesized 10% to 38%. Almost 40% of the Chicano gang members who had dropped out of school prior to entering the gang prevention program did return to school. It would be the decision of school officials to determine whether this rate of return-to-school justifies the provision of alternative campuses in selected barrios or neutral locations. Their decision would, of course, be influenced by the cost of providing such services.

In conclusion, this study demonstrated that the alteration of school sites can have a significant impact on the school attendance behavior of Chicano gang members.

## References

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